

Winnetka, IL - Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) met with high school students, university and business leaders to announce bipartisan legislation he's introducing this week that promotes better diplomatic, business and educational relationships with China. The *U.S.-China Engagement Act* expands American high school classes teaching Chinese, increases the number of diplomats posted in China, and provides more help to businesses exporting to China.

"We are not paying enough attention to China. Over 60,000 Chinese students come to the United States to study, but less than 5,000 Americans make the reverse trip," said Kirk. While many of our schools have Spanish, French and Russian language programs, few have Chinese language programs. We need to understand the change underway in the 21st century. China already stands as the world's second largest economy. It is time America provides the diplomatic, business and educational resources to better understand and work with China."

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During a roundtable discussion, Kirk gave details of his legislation that triples the funding to the State Department for public diplomacy in China, authorizes the creation of a new consulate and ten "diplomatic presence posts" in larger Chinese cities, and increases the U.S. contribution to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. To address educational needs, the Act creates competitive grant programs for secondary and higher education institutions for Chinese language training in an effort to help graduating students compete in the global economy. The Act also takes steps to help small and medium size American businesses enter the China market by upgrading resources to the Foreign Commercial Service and creating new export promotion programs within the Small Business Administration.

Today, China produces more steel than the U.S.; it has more cell phone users and is building its own space station. China's economy is second only to the United States. Hundreds of U.S. companies from McDonald's to Motorola are heavily invested in the Chinese market. China has bought several airplanes from Boeing and Chinese purchases of other U.S. exports are climbing at a rate of 15 percent a year.

While American businesses have recognized the importance of China, our government and educational institutions are not keeping pace. The demand for the SAT test in English is relatively stable in the U.S., but the SAT's parent company is expanding in China to fuel growing demand for the college entrance exam in our language. The number of American service officers in China has declined since 1999 and while the U.S. hired thousands of Russian-speaking employees over the 1980s and 1990s, there are only a few hundred

Chinese-speaking employees working for the federal government today.

"At her present rate of growth, China's economy could become larger than America's," Kirk said. The very foundations of our international system are changing during this generation as China's economy continues to grow at a record pace. America must embrace a strong diplomatic partnership that increases the chance our children will enjoy a stable, economically prosperous and peaceful future with China."

Kirk's legislation follows a visit by China's President Hu Jintao to Washington, D.C. last week. Kirk was one of only six members of Congress to meet personally with President Hu. Kirk also traveled to China back in January with Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA), co-author of the *U.S. – China Engagement Act*.

They were the first foreign delegation to visit Jiuquan Space Center, China's manned space launch facility.

Following the roundtable, Kirk and Xu Jinzhong, Chinese Consul General to Chicago, spoke with several Chinese language students at New Trier High School on the need for further Chinese education and exchange programs. New Trier is home to one of the first public high school Chinese programs in America. Also joining Kirk at New Trier was Dr. Debra Stacey, Principal, New Trier High School, East Campus, Dr. Chin-Tu Chen, Professor, University of Chicago, 21st Century Institute, J.D. Bindenegal, VP of Community, Government and International Affairs at DePaul University and Mike Kennedy, VP for Global Government Relations at Motorola.